



JEAN BAUDRILLARD 2024-08-01

TRANSSEXUALITY

BIOPOLITICS BODY, SIMULATION, TRANS, TRANSSEXUAL

The sexual body has now been assigned a kind of artificial fate. This fate is transsexuality – ‘transsexual’ not in any anatomical sense, but rather in the more general sense of transvestitism, of playing with the commutability of the signs of sex – and of playing, in contrast to the former manner of playing on sexual difference, on sexual indifference: on lack of differentiation between the sexual poles, and on indifference to sex *qua* pleasure. Sexuality is underpinned by pleasure, by *jouissance* (the leitmotiv of sexual liberation); transsexuality is underpinned by artifice – be it the artifice of actually changing sex or the artifice of the transvestite who plays with the sartorial, morphological or gestural signs of sex. But whether the operation in question is surgical or semio-urgical, whether it involves organs or signs, we are in any case concerned with replacement parts, and since today the body is fated to

become a prosthesis, it is logical enough that our model of sexuality should have become transsexuality, and that transsexuality should have everywhere become the locus of seduction.

We are all transsexuals, just as we are biological mutants *in potentia*. This is not a biological issue, however: we are all transsexuals *symbolically*.

Take La Cicciolina. Is there any more marvellous incarnation of sex – of sex in pornographic innocence? La Cicciolina has been contrasted with Madonna, virgin fruit of the aerobic sphere, product of a glacial aesthetic, devoid of all charm and all sensuality – a numbed android who by virtue of this very fact was perfect raw material for a synthetic idol. But is not La Cicciolina too a transsexual? Her long platinum hair, her customized breasts, her realer-than real curves worthy of an inflatable doll, her lyophilic eroticism borrowed from a comic-strip or science-fiction world, and above all the hyperbole of her (never perverse or libertine) sexual discourse – all conspire to offer a ready-made and total sinfulness; La Cicciolina is the ideal woman of a telephone chat-line complete with a carnivorous erotic ideology that no modern woman could possibly espouse – except, that is, for a transsexual, or a transvestite, these being the only people left who live through the signs of an overdrawn, rapacious sexuality. La Cicciolina, as carnal ectoplasm, is here very close to Madonna's artificial nitroglycerine or to Michael Jackson's androgynous and Frankensteinian appeal. All of them are mutants, transvestites, genetically baroque beings whose erotic look conceals their generic lack of specificity. They are all 'gender-benders' – all turncoats of sex.

Consider Michael Jackson, for example. Michael Jackson is a solitary mutant, a precursor of a hybridization that is perfect because it is universal – the race to end all races. Today's young people have no problem with a miscegenated society: they already inhabit such a universe, and Michael Jackson fore shadows what they see as an ideal future. Add to this the fact that Michael has had his face lifted, his hair straightened, his skin lightened – in short, he has been reconstructed with the greatest attention to detail. This is what makes him such an innocent and pure child – the artificial hermaphrodite of the fable, better able even than Christ to reign over the world and reconcile its contradictions; better than a child-god because he is child-prosthesis, an embryo of all those dreamt-of mutations that will deliver us from race and from sex.

One might also consider the transvestites of the aesthetic sphere – of whom Andy Warhol must surely be the emblematic figure. Like Michael Jackson, Andy Warhol is a solitary mutant – a precursor, for his part, of a perfect and universal hybridization of art, of a new aesthetic to end all aesthetics. Like Jackson, he is a perfectly artificial personality: he too is innocent and pure, an androgyne of the new generation, a sort of mystical prosthesis or artificial machine capable, thanks to its perfection, of releasing us at one blow from the grip of both sex and aesthetics. When Warhol says: all works are beautiful – I don't have to choose between them because all contemporary works are equivalent; when he says: art is everywhere, therefore it no longer exists, everyone is a genius, the world as it is, in its very banality, is inhabited by genius – nobody is ready to believe him. Yet his is in fact an accurate description of the shape of the modern aesthetic, an aesthetic of radical agnosticism.

We are all agnostics, transvestites of art or of sex. None of us has either aesthetic or sexual

convictions any longer – yet we all profess to have them.

The myth of sexual liberation is still alive and well under many forms in the real world, but at the level of the imaginary it is the transsexual myth, with its androgynous and hermaphroditic variants, that holds sway. After the orgy, then, a masked ball. After the demise of desire, a pell-mell diffusion of erotic simulacra in every guise, of transsexual kitsch in all its glory. A postmodern pornography, if you will, where sexuality is lost in the theatrical excess of its ambiguity. Things have certainly changed since the days when sexuality and politics constituted a single subversive project: if La Cicciolina can now be elected to the Italian Parliament, this is precisely because the transsexual and the transpolitical have combined within the same ironic indifference. This performance, unthinkable just a few short years ago, testifies to the fact that it is not just sexual culture but the whole of political culture that has now come beneath the banner of transvestitism.

This strategy for exorcizing the body by means of the signs of sex, for conjuring away desire through the overkill of its staging, is a good deal more efficient than good old repression founded on taboo. But where this new system really differs from the old is that one cannot see at all who stands to gain from it – for everyone suffers from it equally. The rule of transvestitism has become the very basis of our behaviour, even in our own search for identity and difference. We no longer have time to search for an identity for ourselves in the archives, in a memory, in a project or a future. Instead we are supposed to have an instant memory to which we can plug in directly for immediate access to a kind of public-relations identity. What is sought today is not so much health, which is an organic equilibrium, as an ephemeral, hygienic and promotional radiance from the body – much more a performance than an ideal state. In terms of fashion and appearances, what we seek is less beauty or attractiveness than the right *look*.

Everyone seeks their *look*. Since it is no longer possible to base any claim on one's own existence, there is nothing for it but to perform an *appearing act* without concerning oneself with *being* – or even with *being seen*. So it is not: I exist, I am here! but rather: I am visible, I am an image – look! look! This is not even narcissism, merely an extraversion without depth, a sort of self-promoting ingenuousness whereby everyone becomes the manager of their own appearance.

The 'look' is a sort of minimal low-definition image, like a video image – or what McLuhan would call a tactile image, an image which draws neither attention nor admiration – as fashion still does – but is no more than a special effect, with no particular significance. The look is no longer a function of fashion – it is a form of fashion that has been overtaken. It no longer even appeals to a logic of distinction, it is no longer founded on an interplay of differences: it *plays at difference without believing in it*. It is, in fact, indifference. Being oneself has become a transient performance with no sequel, a disabused mannerism in a world without manners.

The triumph of the transsexual and of transvestitism casts a strange light, retrospectively, upon the sexual liberation espoused by an earlier generation. It now appears that this liberation – which, according to its own discourse, meant the bursting forth of the body's full erotic force, a process especially favourable to the principles of femininity and of sexual

pleasure – may actually have been no more than an intermediate phase on the way to the confusion of categories that we have been discussing. The sexual revolution may thus turn out to have been just a stage in the genesis of transsexuality. What is at issue here, fundamentally, is the problematic fate of all revolutions. The cybernetic revolution, in view of the equivalence of brain and computer, places humanity before the crucial question 'I am I a man or a machine?' The genetic revolution that is taking place at the moment raises the question 'I am I a man or just a potential clone?' The sexual revolution, by liberating all the potentialities of desire, raises another fundamental question, 'Am I a man or a woman?' (If it has done nothing else, psychoanalysis has certainly added its weight to this principle of sexual uncertainty.) As for the political and social revolution, the prototype for all the others, it will turn out to have led man by an implacable logic – having offered him his own freedom, his own free will – to ask himself where his own will lies, what he wants in his heart of hearts, and what he is entitled to expect from himself. To these questions there are no answers. Such is the paradoxical outcome of every revolution: revolution opens the door to indeterminacy, anxiety and confusion. Once the orgy was over, liberation was seen to have left everyone looking for their generic and sexual identity – and with fewer and fewer answers available, in view of the traffic in signs and the multiplicity of pleasures on offer. That is how we became transsexuals – just as we became transpoliticals: in other words politically indifferent and undifferentiated beings, androgynous and hermaphroditic – for by this time we had embraced, digested and rejected the most contradictory ideologies, and were left wearing only their masks: we had become, in our own heads – and perhaps unbeknownst to ourselves – transvestites of the political realm.

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